

THE SEMINAR Q & A Sessions March 17th by Philip McShane

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The Seminar Q+A Sessions

Thursday, March 17th 2011.

I continue with the questions, with the numbering also continuing: this continuity of numbers is convenient for later reference. Some of the questions to follow are compacted from several presented to me: I hope the submitted questions are recognizable! Also, some questions cover ground already treated in previous questions and answers, but lead to further points. So there may be useful repetition. This is obviously true of the first questions, but a new angle emerges related to a question about present Lonergan conferences.

There are only four question here, though others await consideration in two weeks time. I halted at **Question 9** because it seemed to me to be the right place to stop, as it is a key question regarding where we are going, and where you might go at whatever level your interest and education has you. Indeed, I would be happy if that question were isolated and passed on to any group or individual on this grand feast of St.Patrick.

You will notice that Ortega y Gasset figures in my answers: I happen to be preparing my lecture for Mexico on June 16th, "Arriving in Cosmopolis". I would note, however, that there is no effort to compare Ortega with Lonergan. Lonergan did steal his "level of one's time" remark from his reading of *Mission of the University* in the mid-1940s, but he used it in his own way, not with the twists given it by Ortega (see *The Revolt of the Masses*, chapter three, "The Level of the Times")

6. Functional talk is still a difficult notion. Could you illustrate it in relation to conference talk, actual or potential?

Functional talk is not easy, especially at the beginning of this move to a new theoretic dynamic. I have noted that it is to effect talk sentence by sentence, but we are nowhere near such a differentiation of consciousness. This, in itself, is a notion hard to take: new types of differentiation of consciousness required for serious functional work.. It is all the more difficulty to get into that culture when it is implicitly assumed not to exist. This is the assumption that dominates present Lonergan gatherings. It becomes a crude presence when a speaker talks as if she/he were moving comfortably from one specialty to another. But let us stay with our efforts in this seminar. Most of us find it quite strange and difficult to try to hold to precision in talking IN functional research TOWARDS functional interpretation. It is something taken for granted in physics. A recent good set of questions given to me were about the use of questions in such communication. Yes, of course questions are shared, and indeed very specific and detailed questions. For us, at this messy stage, the sharing tends to be pretty general: we just do not have the control, heuristic or contentwise, of what we are talking about.

7. You talk of a present accepted viewpoint: would you enlarge on it in relation to what you mean by theory

I probably shock you by noting that present Lonergan-talk is largely untheoretic. The absence of theory is largely disguised by comparative efforts - Jones and Lonergan - and by complexities of classification such as emerged in Linnaean botany. I leave Lonergan to add to the shock, with his talk of *haute vulgarization* (see CWL 6, 121, 155; CWL 10, 145): " ... their apprehension is mediated by universal norms,

laws, criteria, classifications, serial types, and so on but they are lost in a no mans' land between the world of theory and the world of common sense" (CWL, 6, 121). They speak of the ancient learnedly not noticing their entrapment in common sense : "Augustine, Descartes, Pascal, Newman could make their **commonsense** contributions to our self-knowledge" (*Method in Theology*, 261). They speak of the moderns whose talk is in the main common sense mediated by truncated consciousness. Lonergan students can even be comfortably truncated themselves in their talk of position and counter-position and in the use of the vocabulary of questions. And, above all, they avoid the second half of page 250 of *Method in Theology*. No way, for instance, are they going to try to tell us luminously about the position they hold on a well-defined functional collaboration

Our strategy in this introductory seminar aims at bringing these things to each of our attentions. So, we venture into that part of *Method* 250, and we ask ourselves where we stand in relation to viewpoints accepted by either Lonergan or his followers.

8. Could you say more about the avoidance of totalitarian aspirations through functional collaboration?

"That's a fundamental concern for method, eliminating totalitarian ambitions" (*A Second Collection*, 213): this is the Florida Interview: the paragraph there is worth brooding over. Also worth a read is his comments [top of 222] on writing *Insight*: they rescue us from regular nonsense about his discovering "feelings" in the *Method* period. One of the characteristics of conferences and writings of so-called Lonergan experts is that there is regularly a totalitarian mood. In a recent work I read the remark, made twice on the same page, "all is in place" to change history. Really!

I need hardly say how the conversations **Cij** cut down on that. We are all in this together, giving each other a helping baton! Generally, the compacting of, and avoidance of, the specialties is related to commonsense amateurism. That compacting is the offspring of general bias, which is alive and well in Lonergan scholarship. But more on this in the key question to follow.

9. Might I ask where we are going, not just in this seminar, but in the series? It just does not seem to fit in with the general drive of Lonergan Studies.

The answers to **Question 7** and **Question 8** are obviously directly related to this question, the major question that should in fact be emerging in each of us in growing luminosity. "Where are we going?": that was the question that hung over Lonergan through the decades from 1930 on. "What in earth is to be done?" was the version that he posed, vigorously, to his Jesuit intellectual community in 1935 (it is posed at the end of a letter to his superior, reproduced in full in the Lambert-McShane biography, 144-154). He posed it with equal vigour regarding modern life in *Insight* 7, section 8. He got the basic heuristic of the answer in February 1965 {his brilliant scribbled page is reproduced in the same Bio, p.160). Where are we going? We are trying to get a grip on that page in its broader reach towards an integral global science that is to be effective. Such effectiveness is to be in massive contrast to the putterings of present philosophy and theology. "Philosophy died a long time ago - although its mummy and its skeleton, for generations past, have been on display at certain hours in the Faculties of Philosophy" (Ortega y Gasset, *Historical Reason*, Norton, New York, 1984, 193). And by chance, by **circumstance** (a heavy word for Ortega: see Julian Marias, *Jose Ortega y Gasset, Circumstances and Vocation*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1970, 353-365) that quotation about philosophy is preceded in his text by the following:

"The question is, Why are you here? I mean why is each of you here now? This is not a joke. The question is more serious than it appears." It is more serious because there is a serious crisis. I would like to think

that within us, as in the Spanish Celt, Ortega, there is "an aesthetic apprehension of the group's origins. The aesthetic apprehension of the group's origin and story becomes operative whenever the group debates, judges, evaluates, decides, or acts - and especially in a crisis"(Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, 230). Our topic and our crisis is the forty years of neglecting and dodging that final great insight of Lonergan. No doubt some of you came here with other agenda, but that is mine and I would have you share it. So I entertain the question of "where we are going" and ask you to do the same, and, to quote Ortega again, from the same place " I hope you will not find it impertinent since I myself am going to try and answer it as best I can." Each of us has his or her destination, and I would like to think that, even those who are primarily observers, will sympathize with my answer, even wave it about.

Where are we going? We are going to disrupt the settledness of the Lonergan community in its neglect of functional collaboration. How are we to do that? Well, first of all there is the modest proposal of Lonergan, *Method* 253, about "the crucial experiment": "it will make conversion a topic," where the conversion is to the implementation of functional collaboration

I pointed out the power and significance of functional collaboration in Musicology at the Florida Conference of 1970, and was optimistic about a follow-up to Lonergan's *Gregorianum* Article of 1969 on functional specialization. Nothing happened, nor did the appearance of that article as chapter 5 of *Method* cause a stir. I gave similar pointers in the following decades regarding various zones like economics, linguistic, aesthetics, physics, sports. My colleagues moved gaily - or grimly - on their same old same mold. In my eightieth year I have tired of this silence, so I make a beginning in this 25 seminar reflection on Functional Collaboration, that is to continue through the next six years.

But might we expect side effects to this effort? I would be interested in suggestions about this. Obviously, voicing the challenge could be effective, especially if it also voices a request as to the reason why no attempt of consequence has occurred. Was Lonergan wrong in this suggested division of labour? Or is it really only a convenient division of one's own labour: a sort of filing system? It would be nice to hear either claim made publically, coherently, or better still: made in the context of a personal venture down through *Method*, 250.

Lonergan did not make a mistake, nor did he invent a filing system. Indeed, one can see his achievement as one that makes him foster-father to something the history is at present mothering. Moreover, the mothering is axiomatically independent of the "Grounds of the Division" (*Method* 5.3), and it provides a dynamic towards the discovery of those grounds. When the dynamic is implemented across disciplines, it will slowly lead to common foundations relatively identical to those named on *Method* 286-8, or doctrinally presented in *Insight*..

Might there be something done to hasten that implementation? Perhaps Lonergan students might try for some dialogue on the matter with friends in other disciplines? But then they would surely have to have some conviction about the relevance in their own areas of interest. Still, what about you? We are back to Ortega's question. "The question is, Why are you here? I mean why is each of you here now? This is not a joke. The question is more serious than it appears." If you have a flicker of a conviction, might you not reach out to convince others? Indeed, even if I only annoy you, you might reach out: "Do you see what that crazy Irishman is doing now? Twenty five seminars to end after his 86th birthday! Let's hope he doesn't last the first year :)!"

There are lots of other pointers and suggestions, but perhaps they could come from someone else in richer fashion? Or they are made elsewhere by me in these seminars, this series of FuSes: for instance, there is the answer, **That we are going to be "Arriving in Cosmopolis" in the 10th millennium**, a view to be presented in Puebla, Mexico, meeting of June 16th - 18th.. An equivalent point is made in the concluding

half of *FuSe* 9, "What is Functional Research?" Then there is the problem of developing a perspective on directing the next generation where we did not venture ourselves: into genuine theory and into functional collaboration. There is the task of building a sane perspective on economics slowly into the global dynamic. And so on.

At any rate, this would seem a good place to end the question-session for the Feast of St.Patrick.

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